1. Describe the practice proposed for recognition, and list its objectives. Detail how the practice is innovative, how it promotes high school achievement and how it can be replicated.

PEN PAL POETS AND STORYTELLERS is a multi-grade level collaborative writing project between elementary and high school students. The purpose of this project is to develop an on-going personal and academic relationship between pairs of students who are of different ages first through letter writing, and then through collaborating on poetry and short story writing. The objectives of this project are:

1. To establish a vehicle for communication and collaboration between older and younger students.

2. To give students a constructive outlet for expressing strong feelings and emotions.

3. To develop a sense of audience and an understanding that one may need to alter his/her word choice to be fully understood.

4. To develop and encourage critical, practical, and creative writing skills.

5. To develop writing and editing skills with an eye toward publication.

6. To develop real purposes for writing and speaking and use them in real contexts.

7. To develop a public venue for students to present their work.

8. To underscore the value of learning from and with someone who is of a different age.

Project Plan:

This particular project involved 10 elementary, middle and high school teachers and 160 students of varying ages and ability levels, but it can be adapted to smaller groups. Two classes from each of the elementary schools and five classes from the middle/high school (based on numbers of students) were matched up. Student pairs, consisting of one older and one younger student, wrote letters to get to know one another and to plan ideas for a short story and/or a series of poems. The letter writing took place over two months and then the student pairs met to develop their creative writing ideas. (Some students' work was done on computers using a word processing program, but this may depend on availability and access to them and it does not affect the implementation and/or success of the project.) The students met for two to three sessions, both at the middle/high school and at the elementary schools. During these sessions the older and younger students collaborated and drafted their story/poem ideas based on what was discussed in their letters. Subsequent sessions were used for revision and drafting the final copy. Some students also chose to illustrate their selections. Two outcomes resulted from this project. The first was an anthology of the writings produced by the partners which included photographs and/or artwork of and by the participants. The second was a public reading for the school/community. Although we received a grant to subsidize our publication, teachers may substitute a less costly alternative, which may be done in house, and still achieve the desired effect.

This project is innovative in that it promotes a multi-age, multi-level collaboration. Very often in our lock step curriculum, students are not exposed to nor do they have the opportunity to work with other groups of students who are of different ages. Lev Vygotsky, a noted educational theorist, describes the "zone of proximal development." He believed that what children are capable of doing with the assistance of others might be a greater indication of the direction their learning might take than what they can do alone. The old and young have much to learn from each other. This project is a great place to start what should be a life long process. This project is also innovative in that it provides two opportunities for students to display their work for public consumption by a real audience. This is one of the tenets of current theory and practice in writing instruction.

This project promotes high student achievement because it fosters independent learning and collaboration between and among students of different ages. It encourages students to reflect and think critically about their world and then translate their interpretations into artistic forms such as poetry, fiction and art. The students learn to develop valuable editing skills as they prepare their work for publication in an anthology. And, finally, the students receive validation from the larger community for their hard work and achievement through their publication and participation in the public reading.

2. Describe the educational needs of the students that the practice addresses and how they were identified. List the *Core Curriculum Content and Cross-Content Workplace Readiness Standards* addressed by the practice and describe how the practice addresses the standards.

This largely middle class community is 35 percent minority. Approximately 28 percent of its citizens are below the poverty level. There exists a significant percentage of nonnative speakers of English who must overcome language barriers while they are learning the curriculum. There are also a number of single parent and nontraditional households with parents who are employed outside the home, thus creating other stresses on the family support system. These and other factors may contribute to the poor performance of some students in the early grades. When younger students work closely with older students, the older students serve as role models and provide a link to the younger students' success and achievement. The younger students see a model to emulate and goals to work toward in the not-too-distant future. In addition, among our high school participants are some who are unmotivated and who are low achievers. Linking these students with younger partners makes the older students feel responsible for the younger ones' successes. In the process of "teaching" these students the high school students gain insight into their own learning processes which, in turn, helps them become more successful. This project also addresses the higher order/critical thinking skills called for on both the reading and writing sections of the ESPA, the GEPA and the HSPA.

Language Arts/Literacy Standards Addressed By This Practice

      3.1 All students will speak for a variety of real purposes and audiences.

      3.2 All students will listen actively in a variety of situations to information from a variety of sources.

      3.3 All students will write in clear, concise, organized language that varies in content and form, for different audiences and purposes.

      3.4 All students will read various materials and text with comprehension and critical analysis.

      3.5 All students will view, understand and use nontextual visual information.

Cross-Content Workplace Readiness Standards Addressed By This Practice

      1. All students will develop career planning and workplace readiness skills.

      2. All students will use technology, information and other tools.

      3. All students will use critical thinking, decision-making and problem solving skills.

      4. All students will demonstrate self-management skills.

Demonstrably Effective and Early Childhood Education Program Elements Addressed By This Practice

- Increasing collaboration on learning
- Providing instruction based on individual student needs, strengths and interests
- Involving parents/families in their children's education
- Developing meaningful and challenging curricula for all students
- Integrating technology into instruction

3. Document the assessment measures used to determine the extent to which the objectives of the practice have been met.

1. An on-going record of the number of student participants/partners was kept. The effectiveness of the project was assessed by how many pairs of student partners completed the assignments.

2. Registered holistic scoring of writing and/or other available rubrics was done by both the teachers included in the project and teachers outside the project which yielded both general and specific information about the quality of work and student progress throughout the project.

3. Portfolios were kept which contained journal entries, drafts of letters, poems, short stories and any assignments/activities that stemmed from the writing (essays, thank you notes, oral presentations, etc.) so that students, teachers and parents were able to see the development of the students' work over time.

4. A record of the number of student participants/partners whose work appeared in the final publication and who attended the public reading was kept. The effectiveness of the project was also assessed by the number of participants and their parents who were in attendance at this event.